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1. ENFORCEMENT: EPA's Dimock results cloud Pa.'s pollution case

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Dimock, Pa., has gone from being seen as the town destroyed by drilling to being known as the place where Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. got "crucified."

Dimock played a starring role in the Oscar-nominated anti-drilling documentary "Gasland" as the prime example of gas production gone bad. But after a high-profile round of testing by U.S. EPA, the drilling industry is touting the headlines that call Dimock's water "safe."

Those headlines, though, ignore the reality that Cabot did pollute the water in Dimock, at least according to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. Cabot says it didn't.

DEP still hasn't cleared Cabot to drill in the affected portion of Dimock Township. Three years ago, the agency shut down some of Cabot's wells, fined the company and eventually negotiated a \$4.1 million settlement in which all the affected homeowners got at least two times the value of their home and kept any mineral rights.

John Hanger, who shut down Cabot's drilling back then and levied those fines in the previous administration as head of DEP, understands the confusion but finds it unfortunate.

"I'd say the exaggeration has boomeranged, because some could come to the conclusion that there was nothing wrong in Dimock, and that's not the case," Hanger said in an interview with *EnergyWire*. "The truth here was never what the gas companies or the activists were saying."

The confusion comes as EPA has beaten a retreat on two other drilling enforcement cases, including one where industry allies were able to cast EPA as out to crucify oil and gas companies.

Days after EPA released its final round of results for Dimock, Dallas-based Regional Administrator Al Armendariz resigned because of a 2-year-old video newly circulated by Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) (*Greenwire*, April 30). Armendariz was recorded at a town hall meeting talking with people worried about contamination from drilling. He compared his strategy of making examples of violators to Roman conquerors' strategy to "crucify" random villagers.

The video took on added significance after EPA dropped the case Armendariz had pressed against Range Resources Corp., alleging contamination similar to what state officials smacked Cabot for in Pennsylvania.

Though a close reading of Armendariz's comments shows that his incendiary "crucify" remark applied

to "people who are not compliant with the law," it played on cable news and other media as EPA trying to indiscriminately nail oil and gas companies.

In the second case, EPA agreed to collaborate with state agencies on further testing of water in Pavillion, Wyo., where preliminary results indicated groundwater -- but not drinking water -- had been contaminated by hydraulic fracturing.

No fracking fluid pollution

Pennsylvania DEP did back off from a demand that Cabot build a new water pipeline to the homes affected in Dimock. But it hasn't backed off its contention that Cabot's drilling polluted the drinking water in a portion of Dimock with stray natural gas.

What the recent EPA tests show, however, is that the water was not polluted by hydraulic fracturing fluid. Some of the residents have blamed the contamination on fracturing, and that's what many drilling opponents have staked their complaints on.

To do that, the pressure involved in injecting the frack fluid underground to release gas would have had to push the fluid upward through numerous layers of rock for about a mile.

"The general sense that fracking is poisoning the water is wrong," Hanger said. "The general sense that there's nothing wrong is also wrong."

Cabot, though, says methane in the water wells was naturally occurring and not caused by the company's drilling. The company participated in a study that found natural gas to be "ubiquitous" in the region's well water.

Cabot spokesman George Stark does agree that in the fierce Dimock debate, the issue of methane migration has gotten confused with the idea of fracturing fluid somehow getting into drinking water.

"It morphed from methane into testing for everything else," Stark said. "There's not anything that's not naturally occurring in that water."

Hanger says he doesn't fault EPA for going into Dimock. More testing can't hurt, he said. And he said the EPA officials who made the decision were under intense political pressure from environmental activists, including a protest outside EPA's regional headquarters in Philadelphia.

"There's a long list of people who have played games with the Dimock situation," Hanger said. "Methane migration was a finding that, at different times, neither side wanted to hear."

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